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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 6700
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 3914
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1275
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1169
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 3534
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 3916
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 8428
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 000217

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH NEW FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: Amb. David N. Greenlee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Late January 27, Foreign Minister Choquehuanca summoned the Ambassador to apologize for the Foreign Ministry's gaffe in prematurely announcing its intention to nominate Sacha Llorentty as Bolivia's next ambassador to the U.S., and to formally submit Llorentty's credentials. He said he's still learning his way around the FM, but seemed eager to get up to speed on his new responsibilities. Choquehuanca noted that because the MFA's employees are protected by law, his Ministry is virtually the only operational part of the new government, expressing relief that he can turn away the hundreds of social sector representatives that have been appearing at his door in search of jobs. The Foreign Minister mentioned the GOB salary cuts affecting ministers, vice-ministers and office directors, and hinted that more is to come. Despite the Foreign Minister's seemingly pragmatic approach, career diplomats are worried about job security and salary cuts. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Foreign Minister summoned the Ambassador (accompanied by poloff) late on January 27 regarding the U.S. granting agreement for Sacha Llorentty as Bolivian ambassador to the U.S. Choquehuanca apologized for the Foreign Ministry's gaffe in prematurely announcing its intention to nominate Llorentty. The Ambassador told the Foreign Minister not to worry and that the Embassy would move the nomination forward via the proper channels.

¶3. (C) Choquehuanca said he's still learning his way around the FM, but seemed eager to get up to speed on his new responsibilities and is receiving briefings on a number of issues. The Ambassador gave the Foreign Minister a Spanish copy of "The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization," by Thomas L. Friedman, for which Choquehuanca expressed his gratitude. Choquehuanca briefly referenced his lack of experience in government, stating that he was previously a "social agitator." He said that one of his vice-ministers will be an expert with "technical experience" to provide continuity to the MFA's work. Choquehuanca also said that the past politics of his staff are irrelevant, and that he expects all to turn to the work at hand.

¶4. (C) Choquehuanca expressed relief that the employees of the Foreign Ministry are protected by law, which has enabled the MFA's work to go forward uninterrupted. He said that he has turned away hundreds of social sector representatives that have appeared at his door in search of jobs. The Foreign Minister said that his ministry is virtually the only operational part of the new GOB, because the other ministries have succumbed to social-sector pressure to replace many government employees.

¶5. (C) The Foreign Minister mentioned the GOB salary cuts affecting ministers, vice-ministers and office directors, and hinted that more is to come. He emphasized that the salary structure will be flat, with vice-ministers earning only 200 bolivianos (\$25) less than ministers each month. He said if the salaries drop too low, the GOB will have difficulty in retaining technocrats/consultants.

¶6. (C) Poloff met with Ruben Vidaurre, Director of International Organizations, on January 30 to gain his perspective on changes in the MFA. Vidaurre reported that career diplomats are "very nervous" about salary cuts and job security. Most believe that President Morales will overturn their protected status by presidential decree within the next six months, the time in which GOB spokesman Alex Contreras said the new government will be "closely examining" the public sector. Of the possible new requirement that all diplomats speak Aymara or Quechua, Vidaurre seemed resigned to take the classes, but said that many of his colleagues are beginning to seek employment elsewhere.

¶7. (C) Comment: The Foreign Minister appears amiable enough, but is clearly immersed in an ideological need to impose an

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indigenous imprint on Bolivia's diplomatic corps. While he was recently quoted in the press as saying that he hadn't read a book since 1992 so as not to become infected by Western ideals, Choquehuanca seemed genuinely interested in having a solid relationship with the U.S. We think we can work with him, but it won't be business as usual. End comment.
GREENLEE